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SELECT COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DISPARITY AND FAIRNESS IN GROWTH

ROUNDTABLE ON "GOOD PAY FOR HARD WORK: APPRENTICESHIPS, WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT, AND OTHER PATHWAYS TO HIGH-QUALITY JOBS"

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Good morning, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee. Thank you for having me today.

My name is Melissa Wells, and I am the Special Assistant to the President of NABTU.

I'd like to begin by expressing NABTU's gratitude to the Committee for convening this important discussion on subject matter that is among our top priorities.

Thank you for allowing NABTU to amplify our efforts and share industry best practices for increasing diversity and pathways to construction careers through registered apprenticeships and apprenticeship readiness programs.

Over the next 15 to 20 years there will be historic investments made that will spur new construction and increase the demand for skilled labor. Now more than ever, it is critical we continue to expand access to registered apprenticeships (RAs) and continue to ensure RAs incorporate quality standards and worker protections. The important protections of the registered apprenticeship model safeguard the quality of construction, the highest level of training, and the safety and security of the most skilled, competent, and competitive workforce we'll need to build the next generation of infrastructure in communities across America.

NABTU commends the recent DOL rule rescinding IRAPs and the Administration's commitment to protecting and expanding support for gold standard registered apprenticeship models. The Registered Apprenticeship model ensures workers develop skills in a well-structured, regulated format, with transparency requirements, uniform standards, and mandatory safety training.

NABTU's gold standard registered apprenticeship continues to be uplifted as a model that provides an onramp to construction careers and a ladder to the middle class. NABTU and its signatory contractors invest nearly \$2 billion annually in a nationwide training network with over 20,000 instructors in 1,600 training centers, providing the highest quality training in the industry. Through Registered Apprenticeship, union construction's unparalleled training and education model has increased safety, skill, and productivity in the construction industry for over 80 years.

NABTU believes the demographics of our unions should closely resemble the demographics of where we live and work. And that's exactly what we have been working to achieve. We know from experience that increasing diversity and access to construction careers is achieved only through targeted policy, intentional expansion of and access to registered apprenticeships, and guaranteeing workers in the industry obtain high-growth careers that provide family-sustaining wages and benefits.

The unionized sector of construction, the Building Trades organized sector, recruits a high percentage of apprentices who are people of color and women. Over the last 20 years, NABTU's registered apprenticeship programs have registered 40,000 more women and nearly 300,000 more people of color than the unorganized construction sector.

This growth is because of our dedication to paying family-sustainable wages, ensuring high labor standards, providing health care and retirement, and using apprenticeship readiness programs and registered apprenticeship to uplift people into the middle class. Apprenticeship readiness programs, such as the Multi-craft Core Curriculum (MC3), are key to increasing diversity across the industry because these programs connect historically marginalized workers to registered apprenticeship and help workers enter the construction trades.

There are nearly 200 Apprenticeship Readiness Programs across the United States that provide underrepresented communities with opportunities to access the middle class through Registered Apprenticeship. ARPs are administered by state and local Building Trades Councils, and they teach the nationally recognized MC3.

These programs provide a gateway for residents - focusing on women, people of color, and transitioning veterans - to gain access to Building Trades registered apprenticeship programs. 70 percent of workers who completed apprenticeship readiness programs are still enrolled in their registered apprenticeship program. This is important to highlight because it demonstrates that apprenticeship readiness programs provide sustainable access to construction careers offering upward mobility. These programs are flourishing due to our intentionality and partnerships with scores of local and national groups like YouthBuild, National Urban League, United Way, Catholic Charities and Goodwill Industries. ARPs are bringing construction education back into high schools, engaging young people early, and are being taught in state prison systems, opening opportunities for the justice-involved who want a chance to change their life.

Additionally, NABTU and its industry and community partners have established TradesFutures – a nonprofit organization aimed at helping support career pathways and high-quality jobs in construction for women, people of color and other historically underrepresented groups. TradesFutures is launching two childcare pilot programs this year in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in partnership with the EmpowHer and the Milwaukee Building Trades Council and, in New York City in partnership with Nontraditional Employment for Women (NEW) and the NYC Building Trades Council. The pilot programs will cover the cost of childcare for apprentices in both cities. Childcare remains a significant barrier to employment and NABTU is committed to helping remove this and other barriers for construction workers. There is a need for more investment in apprenticeship readiness programs and the critical wrap around services that are necessary for recruitment and retention of registered apprentices. If our industry is to meet the demand for skilled labor with a more diverse workforce, we must invest in wrap-around and support services that set workers up for success.

Lastly, provisions in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (IIJA), Bipartisan CHIPS Law, and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that tie funding to expansion of registered apprenticeships, increasing a diverse workforce, promotion of labor standards and project labor agreements are guardrails that ensure federal investments and industry partners increase access to equity and opportunity for workers.